

# St Christopher's Lower School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	109497
<b>Local authority</b>	Central Bedfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	377931
<b>Inspection dates</b>	26–27 January 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Joseph Peacock

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	211
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Terry Colbourne
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jennifer Woodward
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	31 January 2007
<b>School address</b>	Gorham Way Dunstable LU5 4NJ
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<b>Age group</b>	4–9
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	26–27 January 2012
<b>Inspection number</b>	377931



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## Introduction

Inspection team

Joseph Peacock

Additional inspector

Fatiha Maitland

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors visited 14 lessons and observed eight teachers. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They held meetings with the headteacher, representatives of the governing body and staff, and talked to parents and carers and to pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at school planning, assessment data and pupils' completed work. They assessed the quality of the school's documentation including minutes of meetings of the governing body, improvement planning and policies and procedures relating to safeguarding and children's welfare. The inspectors scrutinised 54 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, and those returned by staff and pupils.

## Information about the school

The school is a little smaller than the average primary school. The proportion of pupils from a variety of minority ethnic backgrounds is above average. However, the proportion who speak English as an additional language is below average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is broadly average. There are no disabled pupils on roll at present. A below average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. The school has a number of awards including National Healthy School status and the International Schools Award. The school's last routine inspection was deferred following a review by Ofsted, which found high attainment was being sustained. At the beginning of April 2012, the school will become an academy.

Day care, managed by a private firm registered with Ofsted, is provided before and after school. There is also a privately run pre-school on the site. Both of these aspects of provision are inspected and reported separately.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Achievement of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>

## Key findings

- This is a good school where some outstanding features from the previous inspection five years ago have been maintained.
- Pupils achieve well. Following a dip last year, attainment has returned to its usual high level in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2 and Year 4 when pupils leave.
- Children in the Reception year are provided with a good start to their time in school. They enjoy a good range of exciting learning experiences both indoors and in the spacious outdoor area which they share with pre-school children.
- Pupils with special educational needs make good progress overall with some making exceptional progress because of the quality of the support they receive from staff.
- Behaviour and safety are outstanding, as they were previously. Excellent behaviour in lessons and around school reflects pupils' highly positive attitudes to learning.
- The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and this contributes significantly to their positive attitudes and behaviour in lessons.
- Teaching is good, overall. However, teachers' expectations of what pupils can do on occasions are not high enough and planned tasks do not always build successfully on pupils' prior learning.
- The teaching of phonics (letters and their sounds) is not as effective as it could be in the Reception year and Key Stage 1 because of the large size of teaching groups. As a result, work on letters and their sounds are not always matched closely to the different abilities of pupils.
- Leadership and management are good. Staff and the governing body work well as a team with a clear ambition to improve the school.
- Partnerships with parents and carers are a strength, reflected in the very positive response to the inspection parental questionnaire.

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## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the teaching of phonics in Reception and Years 1 and 2 so that new learning is more closely matched to pupils' prior knowledge of letters and their sounds.
- Increase the rate of progress for pupils in some lessons by:
  - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve
  - using the wealth of assessment information to plan tasks which more closely meet the learning needs of all groups of pupils.

## Main report

### Achievement of pupils

High standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2 were sustained from 2007 until 2010. Pupils continued to make good progress and their attainment was high by the end of Year 4. However, there was a dip in attainment at the end of Year 2 in 2011. This coincided with a year group where boys outnumbered girls by two to one and there was an unusually high proportion of pupils with special educational needs. School data shows that these pupils still made good progress from their starting points.

Children enter the Reception class with knowledge and skills that are broadly in line with those expected for their age. There is a strong emphasis in all activities on developing relationships and the right attitude to learning. Most children make good progress and attain skills that are above average for their age in all six areas of learning by the end of Reception. Their personal, social and emotional development is a particular strength. However, groups for teaching letters and their sounds are too large and as a result, skills in this area are weaker than in others. The phonic groups are also large in Years 1 and 2 and as a result, some pupils do not make as much progress as expected during phonic sessions.

Pupils make good progress overall through Key Stages 1 and 2, though progress in lessons is not consistently good because some teachers' expectations of what pupils can do are not high enough. Nevertheless, by the end of Year 2, overall attainment is well above average. There is little difference in the performance of girls and boys as all share the same positive attitudes towards learning. High attainment is maintained in English and mathematics by the end of Year 4. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because of the expertise of staff and the commitment to giving these pupils all the support they need. The few pupils with English as an additional language make good progress because they too are well supported in class. Parents and carers are, rightly, very positive about the good progress their children make.

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## Quality of teaching

Parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire were in full agreement that teaching is good. Their view accurately reflects the overall quality of teaching which ensures that pupils make good progress as they move through the school. Pupils play their part in successfully maintaining high standards by their positive attitudes and keenness to learn. These stem from the outstanding social and moral aspects of their personal development. Where teaching is most effective, the pace of lessons, careful match of work to pupils' different age and ability levels and rapport between pupils and staff result in most working hard and completing challenging tasks. They make valuable gains in their learning and skills as a result. Year 2 pupils, for example, discussed 'wow' words to try and find an exciting way to describe a bucket of water and sponge which had been left in their class. They rose well to the challenge. Accurate assessments of pupils' progress are regularly undertaken and teachers' marking routinely gives pupils clear guidance on how to improve their work. Where teaching is satisfactory, teachers' lesson planning does not provide enough challenge for pupils of different ability levels and some are given tasks that are too easy. They finish quickly, therefore, and mark time waiting for further work to be set.

The quality of teaching in the Reception year is good. Teacher expertise ensures that most children make good progress in activities planned for indoors or in the spacious and well-organised outdoor area. Children thoroughly enjoyed dressing up as pirates, hearing stories in the tent or using a metal detector to find gold coins in the sand. Indoors, children celebrated the Chinese New Year by painting and drawing Chinese writing or using the restaurant for role-play activities. The game outdoors of 'What time is it Mr Wolf?' was thoroughly enjoyed by staff and children. In Reception and Years 1 and 2, teachers are challenged by over large groups when trying to teach letters and their sounds. Over time, they successfully teach these essential skills and as a result, pupils apply these skills well and make good progress in reading.

The progress of individual pupils with special educational needs is assessed frequently and relevant additional support is provided where necessary. Teachers' marking usually gives pupils clear guidance on how to improve their work. Some pupils in their questionnaire say that they would like to know more about how well they are doing. This is a further indication of their positive attitudes and willingness to work hard and do well. Homework is set regularly and this helps to accelerate pupils' progress and understanding.

## Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour in lessons is exemplary with most pupils showing how keen they are to learn and do well. Pupils work conscientiously and sensibly in groups or with their partners and clearly respect one another's views and opinions. Pupils listen attentively and are quick to respond to class instructions. Even when tasks are not sufficiently challenging, those who finish early sit and wait patiently for the next instructions. Pupils' outstanding behaviour is a key factor in the school's continuing

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success. There is an excellent atmosphere for learning in class and adults are highly effective in encouraging and motivating pupils to do their best. The good progress made by pupils who have special educational needs reflects the expertise and commitment of staff to care for and support these pupils.

The school deals promptly and effectively with any form of bullying or thoughtless behaviour. Pupils and the overwhelming majority of parents and carers say that behaviour is good, that the school is a safe place and almost all believe that any incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively. Excellent relationships between adults and pupils are evident. Older pupils look after younger ones at break and all pupils say that they feel free from any worries about bullying or intimidating behaviour. There have been no permanent or fixed-term exclusions in recent years. All safeguarding policies and procedures are reviewed regularly and safety checks are frequent and rigorous. Pupils' attendance has been improved by some decisive action to recognise and reward good attendance over the past two years. It has gone from below average to above average as a result.

### **Leadership and management**

The school's good reputation within the community attracts about a third of the pupils from out of the normal catchment area. Parents and carers are very positive in their praise of the experienced headteacher and teachers. Over the years, the highly skilled headteacher has developed a strong sense of team spirit. Staff work as one, sharing a common ambition for improvement. Professional development is a strength with all staff willingly attending training sessions to keep abreast of the latest developments. All are fully involved in evaluating attainment and the quality of teaching and learning, though judgements about teaching do not always take enough account of its impact on learning. Regular assessments of pupils' progress highlight any areas which need improving. The commitment and dedication of staff are backed up and supported by a governing body which has a wide range of professional expertise. Its members are knowledgeable and fully involved in identifying areas for improvement from their frequent monitoring visits. This contributes to the school's good capacity to improve.

The highly effective promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is well embedded and reflected in the excellent relationships and pupils' outstanding behaviour and respectful attitudes. Through religious education lessons and frequent visitors, pupils have a good understanding of cultures other than their own. Their multicultural awareness is enhanced by events such as Africa study days and the International School's Award in recognition of links with other countries.

The curriculum is good, providing pupils with interesting learning experiences. There is a strong focus on promoting basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. Good use is made of class computers to promote literacy and research skills. All pupils are taught to speak French, and gardening is part of the curriculum. The garden area produces an excellent crop of vegetables. Pupils enjoy attending a good range of before- and after-school clubs, such as multi-sports and country dancing.

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Effective arrangements for safeguarding pupils reflect the high level of care by staff. The school has an effective policy for ensuring all pupils are treated equally. From the very start, extra attention is given to motivating all pupils and igniting the desire to work hard and do well. Every parent and carer who responded to the questionnaire agreed that staff efforts to promote equality and deal effectively with any bullying or discrimination are instrumental in ensuring the school maintains its industrious and happy atmosphere.



## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



30 January 2012

Dear Pupils

### **Inspection of St Christopher's Lower School, Dunstable, LU5 4NJ**

We enjoyed our visit to your good school and could see why your parents and carers say that you like school so much. Your teachers and other staff work hard to make school an exciting and happy place for everyone. All of you behave brilliantly in your lessons and around school. It was good to see how kind and thoughtful you are to one another. Your good attendance shows how much you enjoy coming to school each day.

St Christopher's is a good school. All of you are making good progress, achieving high standards for your age in reading, writing and mathematics in Key Stages 1 and 2. However, your progress in some lessons is not as good as it is in others because work is sometimes too easy for some of you. We have asked your teachers to make sure that they plan challenging work for all of you: work that will make you concentrate every minute. This will help to make standards even higher for everyone. We have also asked your teachers to give you more practice with your letter sounds in Reception and Key Stage 1, and to make sure you work in smaller groups so that you get more help and the chance to make faster progress.

The youngest of you get off to a good start in the Reception year and have lots of activities to enjoy in the classroom and outdoors. We saw how well you all listened to instructions and how hard you tried to do your best. It was good to see how much you use computers and other modern technology when you are working in Reception. We hope you continue to enjoy all your exciting activities and games.

Well done to the gardeners for growing the giant carrot in the school garden plot. We could see how proud you are of this achievement and all your others which are celebrated each week in the special assemblies. We do hope you continue to enjoy school, and help it to improve still further by working just as hard in all your lessons.

Yours sincerely

Joseph Peacock  
Lead inspector

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